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ABSTRACT

The goal of this program is to address the ongoing issue of the delivery of quality counseling services. The delivery crisis, present in many areas of counseling and psychological services, is also a reality in career development services. In fact, it is an accelerating issue in career development services because of new demands that work should meet many personal needs of workers and that career development services should help clients find such work. This program brings together a variety of current strategies which address one issue: how best to provide useful career development services to college students. The program focuses on two areas: intervention originating in university counseling centers and the outreach approach of undergraduate courses in career choice. This program aims to present participants with specific skills and techniques needed for delivering career development services to college students. (Author)

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LIFE PLANNING--AN ACTION ORIENTED, SELF-DIRECTED APPROACH

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LIFE-CAREER PLANNING, A MODEL FOR EXPANSION

Career Counseling is finding its place in the sun and old-style vocational or job counseling is passe. Counseling is moving rapidly forward adopting an impressive array of new technologies for the career-counseling process. Numerous examples of this enthusiasm at various levels of development are in the current literature.

Skovholt and Hoenninger (1974) have demonstrated the successful use of "Guided Fantasy," a technique adopted from psychotherapy, in career-counseling groups. The impressive work of Holland draws continuous interest and revision, as in the work of Cochran, Vinitsky and Warren (1974). Moore (1973) introduced the exciting idea of a "Career Newsletter" with brief items taken from a number of periodical sources. And the list of new ideas goes on and on, some large and all-inclusive, others small and particular.

Numerous devices are now on the market for ready adoption or adaption by the career counselor. AGA sells "Career Wheels." There's The Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1974) and The Art of Developing a Career (Friel and Carkhuff, 1974). Computer retrieval systems and mail order testing services are readily accessible.

Each of these ideas and resources, as well as countless others not mentioned, is exciting in its own right. Yet we are not near the point of completion. No one idea will meet every need, nor should it, if the field is to remain vigorous and to meet the needs of the variety of clientele we serve. Each counselor is called upon to pick and choose, test, validate, or reject, and fit programs to local needs. With that in

mind, the discussion below provides an alternative career counseling approach, new in some respects, tried and true in others.

Background

Several years ago, the faculty of the School of Business Administration at Southern Methodist University decided to provide a life-career resource center for their student body and themselves. The life-career planning concepts and processes described were developed and tested while the author was Director of Counseling in the subsequent Life Planning Center.

Why something new? The basic philosophy of the school was and is to provide the student with the maximum opportunity for proactivity and self-direction, with as little imposed external structure as possible. The career-planning system described below represents an effort to show the counselee what, but not how, he is to learn about himself and the career world, i.e., it is hoped that he will be encouraged to "exercise" his own ingenuity in finding ways to reach the program goals. Our goal was to assure that the student-client developed a strong data base upon which to build a Life-Career Plan. The "Plan" is conceived as in a constant state of reformation throughout life, but it should be conceptualized in specific terms as a representation of a general life direction.

General Concepts

What is a "Career"? "Career" is not synonymous with "Job"! "Career" is not only "Work"! "Career" is not restricted to production for economic reward. "Career," as used in the Life Planning Center process, refers to

the combination of things that yield a sense of direction and ongoing development to the individual and to a major extent his/her significant others. In that sense, "Career" is the evolving whole of the adult growth and development process. It is naturally reflected in the employment sphere, the place where most of us spend the majority of our waking hours for 30 to 40 years. The "Career" is not simply a reflection of what we are, it is a major portion of what we are and deserves appropriate attention.

What is the role of the counselee? He is asked to be a proactive thinker, searcher and synthesizer. He implements an extended search for self and career data, using every resource available, and is responsible for pulling such data together, weighing the elements, and making decisions and plans based on those considerations.

What is the role of the counselor? The counselor, in the ideal, is a resource to aid in instigating the search, reflects issues, raises questions, and acts as a validity check for counselee perceptions of himself and the career world.

The Process

Career planning is conceptualized in this process in four major phases: Self-Exploration; Career-Exploration; Integration; and Action Planning. The process may be visualized as broadening and subsequent focusing (see Figure 1). In practice, there is considerable overlap of the four phases as well as the likelihood of recycling or looping back, particularly from Career data to reinvestigation of various areas of Self data.

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Insert Figure 1 About Here
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The phases, as outlined for the counselee in the Career Planning Guide (Williamson & McAleer, 1973) suggest that he gather data about and develop understanding in several areas. He may seek to reach the goal in numerous ways. An abbreviated outline follows:

I. Self-Exploration

A. Personal Values - An appraisal of those things, issues, etc. of high importance and of little importance to you.

B. Personality and Temperament Factors - What are those prominent characteristics that identify you?

C. Interest Patterns

1. What activities interest you the most and least and why do they affect you that way?
2. With what occupational-professional groups do you share common interest patterns? What are the characteristics of these groups that might be important to you?

D. Past Performance - What have you done most successfully and what made you successful? Identify things at which you feel you have failed or at which you feel you've been unsuccessful and why.

E. Current Skills - Identify your skills and aptitudes, regardless of how small or large, how typical or unusual.

F. Key Characteristics - From all you've said above, select those points you feel are most meaningful.

G. Personal Profile Summary - Based on the preceding sections describe:

1. The kinds of work activities, e.g. building, planning, etc., that would seem most satisfying to me.
2. The kinds of work environment, e.g. quiet, outdoors, people, etc., that would seem most satisfying to me.
3. The kinds of relationships with people, e.g. friendly, cooperative, supervisory, etc., that are most satisfying to me.
4. The kinds of work activities, environments, and relationships that I should avoid or minimize.

H. Key Questions - Based on the profile of yourself you have developed, think through and write down the key questions you should ask or find the answers to when you look into the nature of potential careers and jobs. What would you like the answers to be?

Example: I'm a quiet, shy person. Would I be expected to make a big show with a lot of strangers? I would like to hear that that would not be expected initially, but I would be trained to handle public contact.

II. Job/Career Exploration

Note: It is important to emphasize that the purpose of this exploration is to gather information and impressions, not to find a job. It is also important that the "Explorer" make that clear when he asks for interviews.

A. Potential Careers - List those careers you are considering (for whatever reason). Describe the career as you now see it and note your

reasons for considering it. You will probably want to add to this list as your explorations progress.

B. Exploration Plan - For each career you plan to explore, identify:

1. Several companies, agencies, etc. to interview.
2. The Career Steps (jobs, positions) to explore.
   a. It's important to talk to people who are actually doing what you would expect to do.
3. Any special considerations you need to keep in mind.

C. Job/Career Data - For each person you interview, evaluate what you learn in terms of:

1. Comparison with "Personal Inventory."
2. Comparison with "Current Skills."
3. Learning needs to fill this person's position.
4. Conclusions.

D. Career Goal Selection - From the data obtained in the foregoing exploration (Personal and Job/Career), rank the potential careers in order of priority as they now seem to you to be desirable and obtainable. Identify:

1. Principal factors influencing the ranking.
2. Possible or probable sequence of jobs in the career.

III. Job/Career Planning

A. Identify your Career Goal, e.g. Bank President

B. Develop a general description of your plans for achieving that goal, including the steps in the career ladder.

C. Considering your current traits and skills, what needs do you have preparatory to that goal, e.g., must study finance, develop management skills, etc.?

D. What programs will help you develop the appropriate skills and traits, e.g., master's degree program in finance?

E. Break down your preparatory needs and the programs to meet them as specifically as you can, e.g., elementary accounting knowledge - introduction to accounting course and degree program.

F. Repeat steps A through E for at least one alternate career course.

G. It is helpful to develop a schematic diagram of your career plan with a time frame. An example is provided below. (Figure 2)

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Implementation

The abbreviated outline above represents a logical application of a decision-making model based on data gathering, analysis, decision, and action-step planning. Methods of implementation are bounded only by the imagination (or its absence) of the client-counselor team. Along with our clients, we have identified several general kinds of activities that seem profitable.

The key to self-exploration lies in three activities:

1. Introspection is a sine qua non in the process of self-discovery. Many clients learn to examine themselves in new ways with only

slight encouragement from their counselor. One student put it succinctly: "I never expected to have to answer such questions about myself."

2. Few of us get direct unsolicited feedback about ourselves. It is useful, in developing self-knowledge, to gather well thought-out impressions from those around us. It is a general recommendation that clients solicit impressions, positive and/or negative, from a variety of persons, e.g. employers, friends and teachers, along the various dimensions of the self-exploration. More concrete sources may also be useful such as review of past performance and ratings on the job. Acquiring feedback may be a threatening task initially, but is particularly rewarding when conducted conscientiously. Clients develop a wide variety of approaches, including in-depth interviews, extensive questionnaires, and free and easy "bull sessions," to get at the data.
3. Exploring oneself with a professional counselor seems very helpful during the self-exploration phase. In counseling sessions, the client deals with materials developed in 1 and 2 above as well as exploring new ideas about himself. It is here that questions are raised and ideas validated, in effect a synthesis of self data takes place. At times the client may also want to call on psychometric data acquired through the counselor or other sources.

Implementation of the career investigation is somewhat less complex, but may be more time-consuming for the client. Many clients show enthusiasm for this activity as it has an air of "realness" about it. He identifies

several careers that seem of interest. Most generally, these are careers that he has been considering previously due to interests, parental advice, etc., but they may be ideas from any number of sources, e.g. interest tests, counselor suggestions, perusal of occupational literature, etc. As the investigation proceeds, others may be added and some will be dropped. For each career, the client gathers two kinds of data:

1. Factual data may be gathered from any number of sources including personnel officers, printed materials, audio-visual aids, etc. Some of these may be provided by the counselor/agency, but the general idea is for the client to dig into old and new sources, e.g. dropping by personnel offices, unions, etc. to get information.
2. Figuratively the question, "What would it be like in this career on Tuesday mornings?" must be answered. The client is encouraged to meet with people at various stages in the career under consideration, to talk with them about what it's like and to compare their needs, interests and abilities to his own. One client wisely suggests the following strategy for getting a balanced view. He asked each person he talked with to present the most convincing argument for his seeking a similar career. Once finished, he then asked the person to convince him not to take that path. Needless to say, the second question caught people off guard and thereby hopefully gained more candid opinions.

Hence, the client gains two kinds of information and impressions to compare to his own self-knowledge. First, what are the general character-

istics of the career? Secondly, how well does the career fit his own pattern of needs and interests? Are its rewards and pressures in keeping with the way he sees himself?

Integration of the self and career data naturally follows from the general design of the program. The effectiveness of the integration seems contingent upon the quality of the counselor-client interactions and the comprehensiveness of the "Key Questions." If the client and the counselor openly and thoroughly discuss the impressions gathered and weigh the alternatives carefully, aiming for congruity between self-knowledge and the career goal, a higher degree of client satisfaction may be expected.

The format of the "Plan' is not rigidly specified, but reflects the needs and style of the individual client. In general, a plan should include five elements (note Figure 2):

1. A frame or continuum of reference along which to project and gauge progress: Most clients use a time reference, but others think in terms of other indications of advancement, e.g. money.
2. A series of objectives: Sequential objectives in a plan should be logical in terms of a long-range goal and probably should be progressively more general in relationship to their positions on the continuum.
3. Learning or acquisition elements: The plan should identify what skills, knowledge, etc. must be acquired in order to reasonably expect attainment of each objective in the series. This requires thorough knowledge of the demand characteristics of each objective.
4. Decision points: The plan should include projected points at

which the decision would be made to continue with the plan as is or to modify it based on new insights or external factors.

5. Alternative paths: In conjunction with decision points, it seems advisable to preselect general alternative directions which might seem appropriate at later points.

Conclusions

What can be said for and against this approach and upon what base? As new as the system is, early indications are that it is of considerable value as an alternative to other "Counseling Center" and "Self-Directed" approaches. In early forms, as well as its current working form, the four-part process has been used by in excess of three hundred students as well as numerous faculty and staff members and representatives of the "mid-career blues" business community. Their reactions are positive at the beginning of new career plans and they project that the results will be positive as the "plan" is implemented and completed. Certainly this is not sufficient proof of ultimate validity, but is indicative of usefulness until such time as long-range data is available.

Several advantages to the client, the agency, and the prospective employer have been noted. The individual takes a thorough and reasonably comprehensive look at himself in the context of setting a direction. In that process, he has the opportunity to collect fresh and "real world" based impressions of himself and careers he's considering. He can integrate this search and planning approach with other resources and programs available to him, e.g. career seminars, "canned" career information programs, etc. And perhaps

most importantly, he develops a new level of proactive decision-making skill to be reapplied as the need arises.

The agency (school, counseling service, public service) has the benefit of a relatively inexpensive comprehensive career guidance system. There is less need for complex data retrieval systems or large information storage capacity. Depending upon counselor skills, clients at numerous levels can be served, and the system is less likely to breed agency reliance than are more "counselor-based" applications of trait-factor approaches.

A final benefit, not predicted, has been pointed out by our students. Employers seem to look with favor upon prospective employees who have developed a solid career plan. Those students who have discussed their search and planning activities with prospective employers report that they are very well received. The benefit to business is obvious: less aimless job floundering.

What then are the disadvantages? Two stand out. First, the process is highly time consuming if carried out thoroughly. Students point this out frequently, adding that it is time well spent. None the less, this raises problems for the client who is not psychologically "ready" to put in the time and effort. With such clients, it would seem better to do something less thorough and come back for a more extended effort at a more opportune time.

Finally, and it seems ironic, many teachers, counselors, and advisors show concern over exercising control, making sure the client has "done an adequate job." It is our experience thus far that given enough input on the front end, most clients will monitor themselves quite well. For those

who don't, it is certainly questionable what value there is in "checking up" on them.

Needless to say, our experience thus far is with a very verbally- and socially-skilled sector of the community. It is no secret that all too many counseling systems are developed on college campuses to then be applied inappropriately to other populations. Currently, individual and group counseling adaptations are being applied with various new samples including the physically and socially disabled, military personnel and junior college students. This particular system does seem adaptable to a variety of client types and we anxiously await input regarding its successes and failures.

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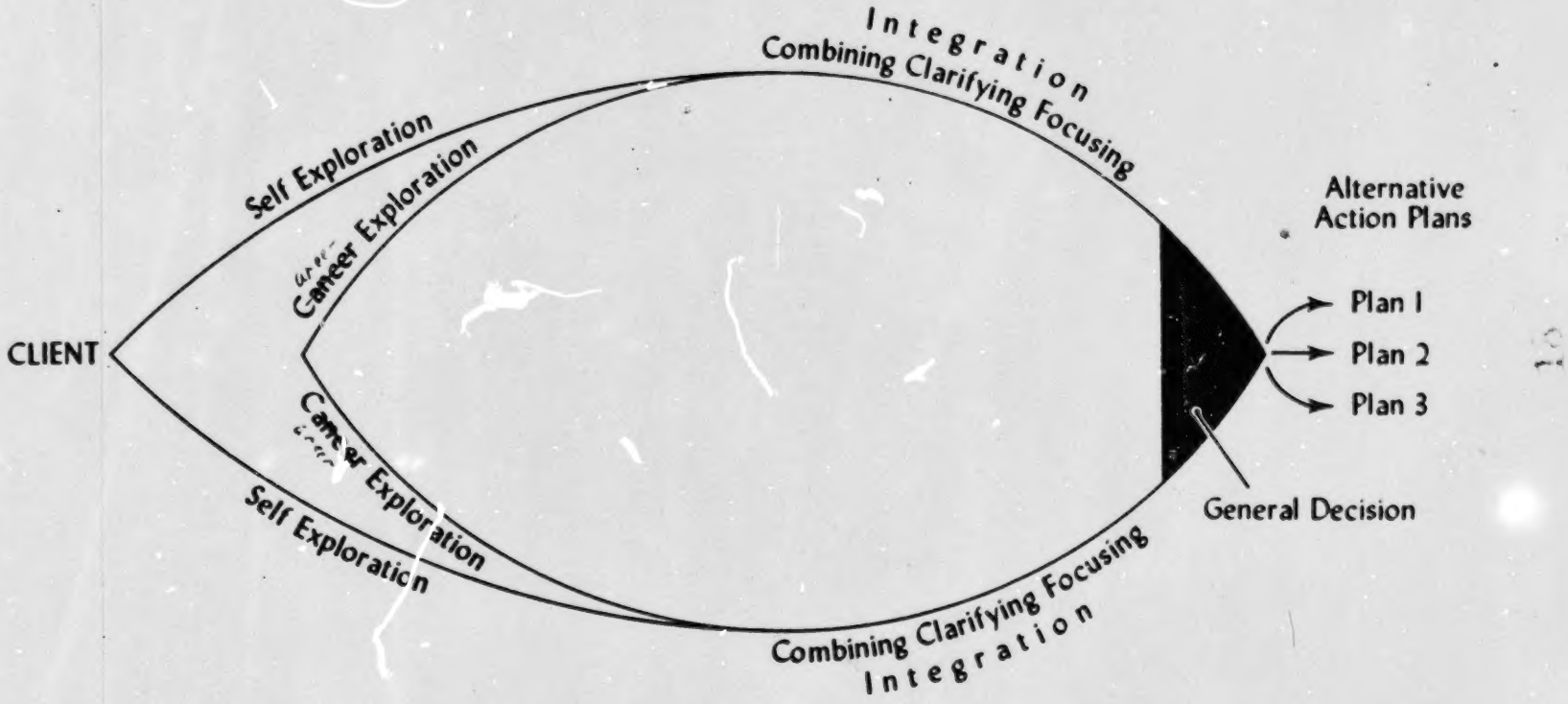
FIGURE CAPTIONS

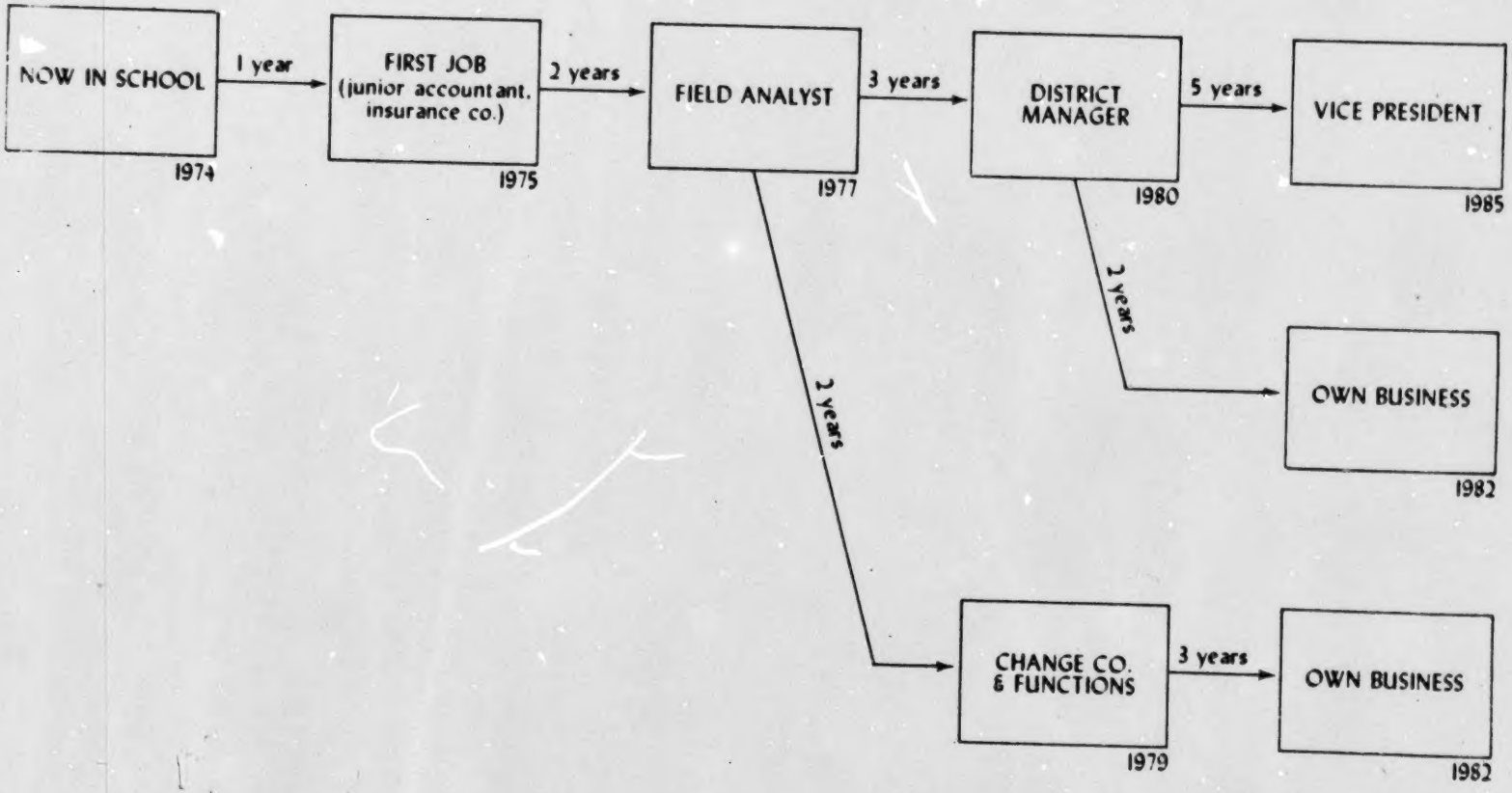
FIGURE 1

Career Planning Phases

FIGURE 2

Career Path Diagram


Integration
Combining Clarifying Focusing
Self Exploration
Career Exploration
CLIENT
Career Exploration
Self Exploration
Combining Clarifying Focusing
Integration
Alternative
Action Plans
Plan 1
Plan 2
Plan 3
General Decision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1 year
FIRST JOB
(junior accountant, insurance co.)
1975
2 years
FIELD ANALYST
1977
3 years
DISTRICT MANAGER
1980
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VICE PRESIDENT
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OWN BUSINESS
1982
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CHANGE CO. & FUNCTIONS
1979
3 years
OWN BUSINESS
1982